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## Bringing Down Gas Prices

The price of crude oil recently crept above \$135 per barrel and gas prices have pushed beyond record levels. The rapidly rising prices are causing great problems for virtually everyone, and more needs to be done to help people at the pumps.

Congress has already taken some important steps to help lower gas prices. First, Congress voted to temporarily suspend filling the Strategic Petroleum Reserve, the nation's emergency supply of crude oil. Because the Reserve is already at 97% capacity, suspending shipments wouldn't harm us in a crisis. But experts expect this action will soon provide some price relief by increasing the supply.

Second, Congress passed legislation to investigate price gouging by retailers who may be using the cover of high prices to unfairly inflate their rates even further.

Third, Congress is holding the OPEC monopoly accountable for price fixing which is unfairly and artificially driving up the cost of crude oil. The legislation would allow the United States to prosecute OPEC-controlled entities for collusion under federal anti-trust law.

Fourth, Congress gave the Federal Trade Commission (FTC) new authority to crack down on manipulation of the wholesale energy markets to keep prices high, and Congress has done everything it can to spur the FTC to investigate.

Fifth, the Big Five oil companies, who are piling up record profits, should not continue getting billions of dollars in taxpayer subsidies. There is a move to repeal those subsidies and instead invest the savings in renewable and alternative energy. New technologies will reduce demand for gas, driving prices down in the long run and helping us kick our addiction to fossil fuels.

Sixth, and finally, Congress passed a landmark energy bill that invests in alternative fuels and eventually requires the average car to get at least 35 miles per gallon. In one year alone, that will save Americans \$22 billion at the pump. And as an added benefit, better fuel efficiency will also dramatically cut pollution. To achieve a comparable reduction in greenhouse gasses, we would have to take 28 million of today's cars and trucks off the road. I know those gains may be a few years down the road; but if we fail to make long-range plans, gas price spikes like this one will happen again and again, until we get the message.

More needs to be done to help the millions of people who are struggling, but this is a great start to dealing with this enormous problem.

## Surplus Federal Equipment Bill

### Wins House Approval

My legislation aimed at providing poor, rural communities with needed surplus federal electronic equipment at little or no cost was recently approved by the House.

The bipartisan Federal Electronic Equipment Donation Act of 2007 (FEED Act), H.R. 752, was approved by unanimous consent and the bill now moves on to the Senate for consideration.

The federal government spends an enormous amount of money on electronic equipment. When that equipment becomes slightly outdated, it shouldn't sit idle or go to waste when there are so many needy small cities, towns, counties, schools and libraries that can still put it to good use.

I put the legislation forward last year after Roper, N.C. Mayor Bunny Sanders contacted my office for help in securing used federal surplus electronic equipment for Roper's Technology Center. While an executive order directing surplus federal equipment to communities had existed, the process was mired in red tape and lacked the force of law.

The FEED Act would streamline the process for donating excess and surplus electronic equipment to small cities, towns, counties, schools, libraries and community-based educational non-profit organizations. The legislation provides preference to poorer communities, which often have the greatest needs.

The act would direct federal agencies to send surplus equipment to the General Services Administration (GSA), which would then handle the logistics of transferring the equipment to qualifying recipients at little or no cost.

This is particularly important to communities in eastern North Carolina and could be an important tool in building the electronic infrastructure for local governments, schools, libraries and educational non-profits. Many of the communities I represent need every bit of help they can get, and hopefully this will free up some resources that can be used to address other pressing needs.

## Congratulating the Rocky Mount Gyphons

This week I recognized the accomplishments of Rocky Mount High School's baseball team, which won the state championship. I entered the following statement into the Congressional Record:

Madame Speaker, please join me in congratulating an outstanding group of high school student athletes from the First District of North Carolina.

It is with great pride that I recognize the Rocky Mount High School's Boys Varsity Baseball team for capturing the 2008 North Carolina High School Athletic Association's 3-A State Baseball Championship series. This is the Gryphons' first state title in 28 years, and this means a great deal to a community that loves its baseball.

Rocky Mount High School boasts a rich athletic tradition, which includes five state titles in boy's baseball. Coach Pat Smith's team lived up to its preseason No. 1 ranking by winning the championship after an 8-6 victory over East Rowan last Saturday. Outfielder Brian Goodwin, who scored three runs in the final game, was named the series' Most Valuable Player.

Rocky Mount finished the season at 27-6, which bettered the school record for wins by three. That record was previously held by the 1980 Rocky Mount squad, which was the last Gryphon team to win the championship.

I ask my colleagues to please rise and join with me in applauding a truly great season by an exceptional team – the Rocky Mount High School Gryphons. We congratulate the team and the city of Rocky Mount, and we wish them continued success.

## Keep Bed Bugs from Biting

I have offered legislation aimed at stemming the growing problem of bedbugs.

Unfortunately, it's not a joke. Fifty years after being virtually eliminated, bed bugs are back all across the country.

The Orkin Pest Control company says that after a five-decade absence, bed bugs can again be found in every state in the United States. And, according to the National Pest Management Association, bed bug complaints have increased 50-fold over the last five years.

There are numerous news reports indicating that bed bugs are showing up in some of the country's finest hotels like the Ramada Plaza in San Francisco, the five-star Westin resort in Hollywood, Florida, and the Regency Inn and Suites in New York City. The fact is, it's becoming a really great concern for travelers

With this in mind, I offered the "Don't Let the Bed Bugs Bite Act of 2008." The bill establishes a state-matching grant program administered by the Secretary of Commerce in consultation with the Travel and Tourism Board.

Funding would be made available to states to establish inspection, prevention and eradication procedures and programs. In order to qualify for the funds, states must require the inspection of at least 20 percent of all of its hotel rooms. The funds would come from within the existing U.S. Department of Commerce's existing budget.

Eliminating bed bugs from hotels is important because it can be the source of a home infestation.

The bipartisan bill has been co-sponsored by Don Young, (R-Alaska), Donald Payne, (D-N.J.), Doris Matsui (D-Calif.), and Williams Jefferson, (D-La.).

Small, but visible to the naked eye, bed bugs are reddish brown in color and feed on blood. Female bed bugs can lay up to five eggs in a day and 500 during a lifetime. Experts say they often hide along headboards, in chairs and couches, and in dressers.

## House Approves School Construction Funding

The House this week approved legislation that would help renovate and modernize public schools in North Carolina and around the country.

By a vote of 250 to 164, the House passed the 21st Century Green High-Performing Public School Facilities Act, which provides funding to states and school districts to help ensure that school facilities and learning environments are safe, healthy and energy-efficient. The legislation includes \$164.4 million in funding for physical improvement projects for North Carolina's schools.

According to recent estimates, America's public schools are hundreds of billions of dollars short of the funding needed to bring them into good condition.

While Congress provided \$1.2 billion in funding for emergency school repairs in 2001, and provided additional resources for schools devastated by Hurricane Katrina and Rita, the Bush administration has not provided direct funding for general school construction in any of its budgets over the last eight years. As a result, schools have been forced to rely mostly on state and local funding for any repair or renovation projects.

Overall, the bill would authorize \$6.4 billion for school renovation and modernization projects for fiscal year 2009, and would ensure that school districts quickly receive funds for projects that improve schools' teaching and learning climates, health and safety, and energy efficiency.

To further encourage energy efficiency and the use of renewable resources in schools, the bill would require that the majority of funds for school improvement projects meet widely recognized green building standards and would provide states with funds to help schools track their facilities' needs, energy use, and carbon footprints, among other things.

In the Gulf Coast, where public schools still face hundreds of millions of dollars in unmet needs in the aftermath of Hurricanes Katrina and Rita, the legislation would authorize separate funds – half a billion dollars over five years – for schools.

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